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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - U.S. National Security
Strategy - Iran Iraq Human Rights Council
PARIS -Friday, March 17, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

U.S. National Security Strategy - Iran
Iraq
Human Rights Council

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Domestic social protest is today's single story in front pages and editorials as the media ponders about yesterday's demonstrations against the government's youth employment legislation and what the next step might be. In Le Figaro, the editorial warns against "A dangerous escalation;" political analyst Nicolas Barotte claims that "student protest could lead to an unpredictable chain reaction of political events," while Ivan Rioufol in his weekly wrap-up column believes this is "a rebellion without an out." Liberation titles its editorial "A Trial of Strength" and suggests that the demonstrators were successful in their opposition to the government, "while waiting for tomorrow's demonstration," to be joined by political parties and employee unions. Le Parisien reports on its front page that two out of three French are in favor of the government withdrawing the controversial youth employment contract (CPE). Azouz Begag, Minister for the Promotion of Equality, pens an op-ed in Liberation entitled: "Employment, It's Urgent." "France's cities had better not, this time, forget the forgotten of equality, who are rusting away on the other side of the tracks. What they see is France's students demonstrating against precariousness in employment, while they consider the CPE as a way to resolve their high unemployment rate."

Afternoon paper Le Monde leads with President Bush designating Iran "as the most threatening country." The National Security Strategy report for 2006 is analyzed. Le Figaro titles on its front page: "Iran: George Bush Does Not Exclude Preemptive Strikes." Inside, the report begins: "All the lessons have not been drawn from Iraq." A separate article reports that "Iran is ready to negotiate with the U.S., but only on Iraq." A theme echoed in two successive articles in Liberation: "Iran Extends a Hand to the U.S." . "Which Declares Iran the Most Threatening Nation." (See Part C)

France Soir entitles its report: "Iran in the Line of Fire" and adds that "the National Security Strategy is clear." "It's no surprise that Iran is in the sights of the Bush Administration, which considers the Mullahs' regime as its greatest challenge." La Croix reports briefly: "The U.S. believes Iran `supports terrorism, threatens Israel and is trying to block peace in the Middle East.' Meanwhile, Washington seems ready to engage in `limited' negotiations with Teheran on Iraq."

Le Monde devotes its editorial to the new UN Council for Human Rights, "to replace the much discredited Human Rights Commission." (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

U.S. National Security Strategy - Iran - Iraq

"Washington Reiterates Preemptive War Doctrine as it Warns Iran"

Eric Leser in left-of-center Le Monde (03/17): "Without admitting to it openly, President George W. Bush is beginning to draw the lessons of the Iraqi adventure into which he dragged his country and some of its allies in March 2003. The 2006 version of the National Security Strategy confirms certain points of the 2002 version, while it introduces a few new highlights. Today, the focus is on Teheran. The new document avoids the phrase `coalition of the willing' used about Iraq. While the U.S. reiterates it is `prepared to act alone,' it also acknowledges `that there is little of lasting consequence that we can accomplish in the world without the sustained cooperation of our allies and partners.' The new doctrine takes into account the pitfalls and difficulties of implementing the administration's promotion of democracy

throughout the world. and recognizes that elections can sometimes have 'undesirable outcomes.' The publication of the report, just when Iran's nuclear crisis is being brought before the UNSC is no coincidence. All in all, the new U.S. strategy is based on the Administration's proclaimed ambition of making the spread of democracy the main axis of its foreign policy."

"The U.S. Does Not Exclude Preemptive Strikes Against Iran"
Philippe Gelie in right-of-center Le Figaro (03/17): "The lessons of Iraq have not all been drawn. The U.S. still maintains preemptive military action as a pivotal means of protecting the U.S. . America's accusations, just when the Iranian nuclear crisis is being brought before the UN, sound like an echo to past accusations against Iraq. The National Security Strategy, presented under the light of this new threat and how to deal with it, is simply an up-date of the 2002 version. The global approach adopted in the report puts more emphasis than before on international alliances. This does not keep Washington from criticizing crucial diplomatic partners such as Russia and China. As a counterweight to the syllogism brandished against Iran, 'No other country poses as big a challenge as Iran. Diplomatic efforts must succeed if we want to avoid a confrontation,' the White House offers a cycle of virtue: freedom leads to democracy, which leads to peace. And it is up to the rest of the world to pick which side to be on."

"Iran Extends a Hand to the U.S."
Jean-Pierre Perrin in left-of-center Liberation (03/17): "Officially, the reason why Tehran says it is ready to talk with the U.S. is that Iraq is in chaos. The Iranian initiative has stunned the international community just when the U.S. is flexing its muscles against Iran. The Iranians claim they are answering an appeal from the Iraqi Shiites. But in reality it is the U.S. who made the offer through their Ambassador to Iraq, Khalizad, who, it is said, wrote a letter to the Iranians. He denies having taken this initiative. In reality, it would seem that Iran is trying to find a pretext for a rapprochement with the U.S. and the Europeans, at any cost. Iran is discovering its isolation, something it did not count on. It can turn neither to Moscow nor Beijing, which despite their differences with the other UNSC members, share the same strategic goal: avoid nuclear proliferation and bring Tehran to conform with IAEA regulations. Iran may be discovering that using the nuclear issue to build national cohesion in its disenchanted society may have taken them too far, and that the confrontation with the West is not so easy to manage. This is clear from the diverging declarations made by Iranian officials. The threat of a civil war in Iraq gives Tehran an excuse to renew its ties with Washington. But will the U.S., which has called Iran its greatest challenge, want to hear the appeal?"

Iraq

"A Major U.S. Offensive Against Iraqi Rebellion"
Thierry Oberle in right-of-center Le Figaro (03/17): "Three years into the war in Iraq, American forces are once again trying to clean up a stronghold of Sunni rebellion. But the operation, code named 'Swarmer', is also intended for domestic policy purposes to control the growing skepticism in American opinion. Polls indicate that Americans fear the Iraqi quagmire might turn into a wider conflict. President Bush's popularity ratings have never been so low: 57% believes that sending troops to Iraq was a mistake, and 67% thinks Bush has no exit strategy."

Human Rights Council

"Human Rights"
Left-of-center Le Monde in its unsigned editorial (03/17): "The UN General Assembly voted for the creation of the new Human Rights Council despite Washington's opposition. This is more than just a change in name. But for the U.S., this reform is not enough and marks a missed opportunity. The Bush Administration does not trust the UN and would have preferred keeping an imperfect Commission rather than having a new Council that could become an anti-western forum all the while maintaining an air of credibility.. NGOs and Human Rights defense organizations approve this compromise which, despite what the Americans say, offers a possibility of moving forward with regard to the former Commission. The EU, for its part, provided a lackluster defense of the realist stance. The Human Rights Council. reflects the ambiguities of the UN. In order to be universal it must be willing to take into its fold countries of every kind." STAPLETON